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Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
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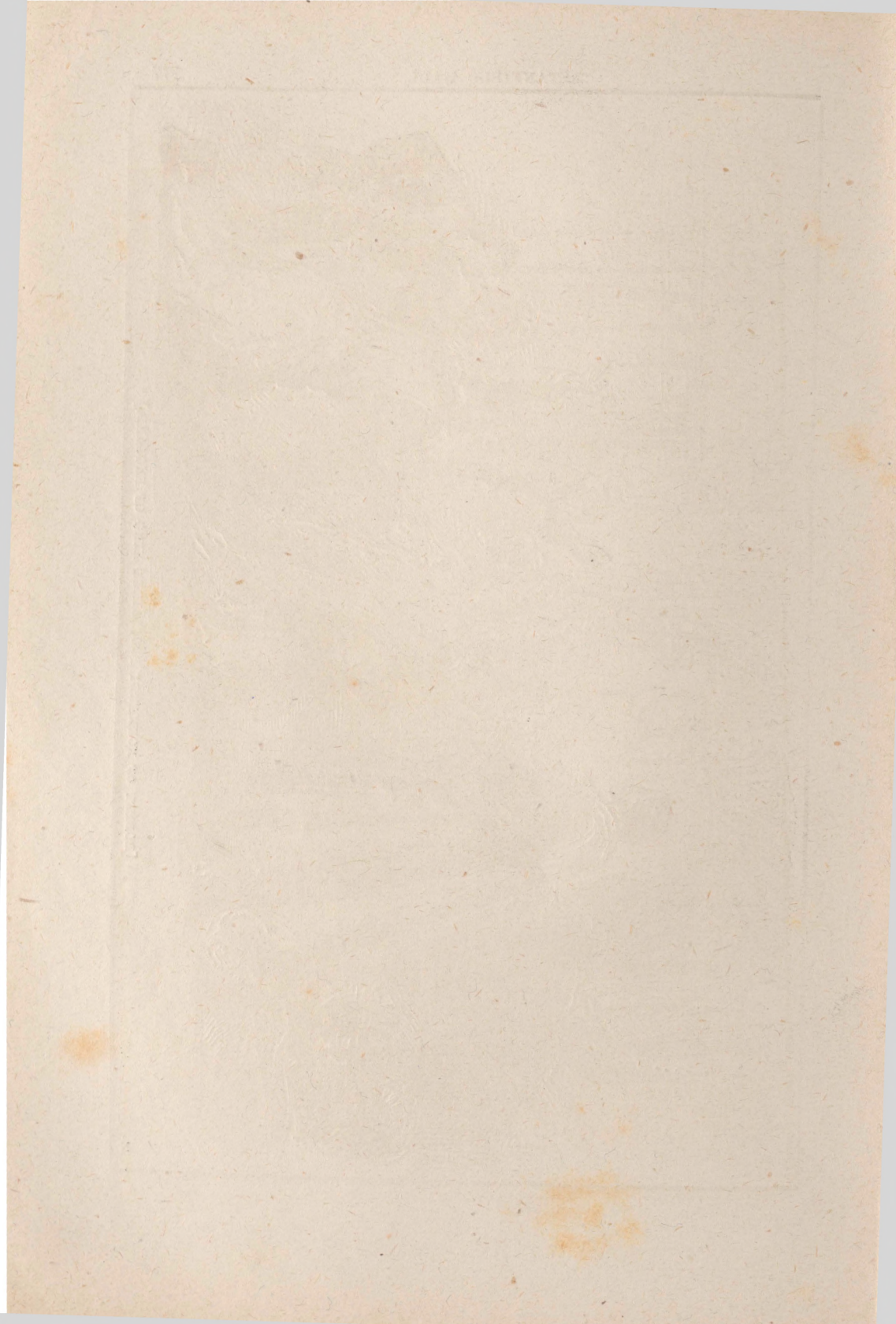
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[ROBERT OF NORMANDY PROCLAIMED KING OF ENGLAND.]



"In the house of the Jew leech, Abram, whose skill none can question, however they may his honesty. He will not answer for his life more than for four-and-twenty hours. He must not die," added the man, "without the Church's aid."

"Doubtless ! doubtless !" muttered the priest. "I will despatch Brother Felix—he is zealous and discreet ; besides, I will order Masses to be said for his repose. The Church, though poor in worldly wealth, is rich in spiritual grace."

"Had you not better shrive him yourself ?" demanded the esquire, bluntly. "Methinks it were but kind to do him that last good office, considering he is your sister's son."

"I enter the house of an unbelieving Jew ? Anathema ! Think on the scandal, my dear son. Should the prior of the Dominicans be seen to enter such a den of wickedness, it would be a blister on my name."

"Better that, than other ears should listen to the confession of your nephew," replied Brantone, who began to see through and despise the selfish nature of the churchman's fears. "You know best what has passed between your kinsman and yourself ; besides, none but you can prevail on the curate of St. Julian to receive his body into consecrated ground. Sir Prior, you must come."

"Well, I suppose I must. Blessed St. Dominic ! shield thy unworthy servant—lead him from this labyrinth ; and if ever again—But how," he added, interrupting himself in his invocation, when he observed the soldier regarding him—"how, without scandal, am I to get there ?"

"Of course, reverend father, you are free to leave the convent at your pleasure."

"Certes I am," answered the prior.

"Nothing more easy," continued Brantone. "As soon as night-fall, conceal your habit in my horseman's cloak ; I will be your escort to the Jew's, where you may give my master a cast of your holy office, and none the wiser ; long ere the matin bell, you can return in safety to your nest."

"Thou sayest he has not many hours to live ?" said the priest, regarding him with a keen glance.

"Thou mayst take the Jew's word for it, father, if not mine."

"Then I will go," said the prior, firmly, "and trust my person to thy escort. Return at evening's close ;—and here," he added, drawing a piece of gold from his pouch, "is something for thine entertainment ; but first go to the curate of St. Julian's, and tell him in my name to meet me at the house of the accursed Jew. Fortunately his cure is a dependency upon our priory, and he may look for advancement at our hands. Heaven speed thee, my son ; be fortunate, and, above all, discreet."

The esquire bowed reverentially to the dignitary, pocketed the coin, and quitted the apartment.

At the hour following the curfew, the reverend uncle was seated by the side of his wounded nephew in the lone house of Abram. Contrary to his expectation, he found the wounded man apparently recovering from his hurt; his voice, though low, was clear, and his eye bright as ever, although his cheek was pale.

"Dog of an unbelieving race," said the ecclesiastic, who stood calmly beside the couch of his patient, "didst thou not send me word the days of my nephew were numbered, nay, his very hours?—and yet I find him strong?"

"My words are of truth," replied the leech; "the strength thou seest is but the last rallying of life—a flash before the lamp expires. The sun which gilds the coming day will shine upon his corpse."

"Liar!" shouted Robert of Artois; "I have been wounded nearer to death than this! I shall live—I will live for vengeance! I will be a brand to thy accursed race! My enemies shall bite the dust before me! Exert thy skill—thou hast not expended all thy nostrums. Stretch the utmost effort of thine art; mine uncle here will glut thine avarice with gold, pour it like water on thy thirsty palm; he hath my hoarded treasure in his keeping; all shall be thine, save but my fleeting life!"

The dignitary winced uneasily upon his seat, and muttered something about his nephew raving.

"It shall be tried," murmured the old man, "not so much for the gold as for the pleasing your reverend kinsman."

Abram left the room for a few minutes; when he returned he bore a small silver cup in his hand, which contained a highly balsamic liquid, and offered it to the lips of the impatient knight.

"Drink!" he exclaimed; "'tis thy last chance of life—a frail one it is true. Should it fail, all human aid is hopeless; a few, a very few, short moments will decide."

Robert of Artois eagerly drained the draught, and sank exhausted upon his pillow. The old man quietly took his seat beside him. Something like a smile of satisfaction was visible on his features, as his long, sharp, bony hand encircled the wrist of the drinker. For more than a quarter of an hour he watched his patient in silence, accustomed to veil every emotion of his heart under a mask of cold impassibility. He hid, even from the keen churchman, the fierce joy he felt as the pulse beat fainter and fainter beneath the pressure of his finger. Seeing that the draught had operated, he rose from his seat, and whispered to the prior—

"All that human skill can accomplish hath been done; what now remains rests between the priest, his conscience, and his God. In an hour Robert of Artois will slumber with the dead."

"I'll have no priest!" shrieked Robert, as Abram left the chamber. "I call upon the fiends to save me! Can I not make a compact but for one year of life? I'll give my wealth, possessions—my soul," he added, "but to live? Will not the tempter hear,

or is it but a fable? Is there no heaven, hell, angel, or demon to assist me?"

The Jew smiled as he withdrew yet farther from the chamber. The despairing curses of the destroyer of his child fell like music on his ear. They were the promise of the completion of his deeply-meditated vengeance.

The hour, as the leech had predicted, had scarcely passed, when the prior summoned the curate of St. Julian's to his presence; he was followed both by Brantone and Abram. It was clear, from the livid cheek of the churchman, that his nephew's confession had been a fearful one, for the blood had entirely forsaken his florid face, and the perspiration hung in thick drops upon his clouded brow. The apparition of the corpse was yet more terrible; the teeth were firmly set, the eyes distended as if they would leap from the head, and its fingers entangled in the fragments of the coverlid, which had been torn in its last fearful agony. So terrible was the appearance of the body, that all but the Jew turned from it in disgust.

"Brother," said the dignitary, addressing his subordinate with that tone of blandness with which a superior intimates a command which the conscience of the hearer should reject, "thou knowest of the misfortune which hath fallen on my house; my nephew is no more. Praise to our Lady! he died penitent. See the body secretly interred this very night within the vaults of the chapelry, and in the morning visit me at my priory. We have long watched thy zeal and diligence in the fold of which we are but an unworthy shepherd, and it is our intention to remove thee to a more extended field of usefulness. For thee, Jew," he added, "the worthy curate on his return will pay thee for thy skill and kindness shown towards the deceased; although the former was but valueless. I need not tell thee to be silent on the events of which thou hast been a witness. Remember this—I caution not twice. Brantone will escort me on my return. Farewell, and *benedicite!*"

Abram and the priest both bowed low, as the prior, without casting a glance upon the couch where lay the body of his nephew, quitted the apartment, and hurried from the house. That very night, Robert of Artois, the noble Norman, whose sword had been the terror of the country, whose exactions desolated the hearths of many a peasant and petty franklin, was consigned to what the world deemed his last resting-place, by the hands of two Jews; no knightly banner waved over his remains; no gilded escutcheon marked his resting-place.

"He will rest securely there," said the curate, as he turned the key in the massive lock of the vault; "his funeral rites must be celebrated at some fitting time. Farewell, friends! I will convey the prior's benefaction to you in the morning; that once done, forget that we have met."

And the pious man pursued his way towards his quiet cell, wondering as he went at his good fortune. The Israelites dogged his footsteps till they saw him housed, and retraced their pathway to the church.

CHAPTER XII.

THE two Israelites cautiously entered the church, and groped their way to the steps which conducted to the vaults where rested the body of Robert of Artois. It was not till they had descended that they ventured to light the torch which the dwarf had brought with him for that purpose ; for the expedition they were engaged in was one of danger, should any curious eye discover their proceedings. The superstitious as well as religious feeling of the age being opposed to the mere entrance of any of their hated nation within the consecrated precincts even in open day, much more so at the lone hour of night, when, according to popular belief, pale witchcraft celebrated its fearful rites—their mere presence under such circumstances was sufficient to condemn them to the stake. The body of the knight had been deposited in an old stone coffin, which had previously served some former inmate, but which in the revolution of time had been despoiled of its original tenant ; the rudely-sculptured cross upon its lid indicated that it had been intended as the final resting-place of an ecclesiastic :

“Some lordly abbot or some mitred priest,
Whose hand had grasped the crosier’s holy staff,
Or scattered benedictions on the crowd.”

“Help me to raise the lid,” whispered Abram ; “the carrion may be stifled else within its narrow cell. Holy Jacob ! how these Nazarene dogs guard their vile ashes from their heir, the worm ! Their pride revolts lest their polluted dust should mingle with its purer kindred earth. So much for Christian vanity in death !”

By the aid of Ezra’s powerful arm the lid of the sarcophagus was soon removed, and the features of the supposed corpse once more exposed to the sweet air of heaven. The elder Israelite gazed upon his destined victim with an air of ferocious joy, as he placed his hand upon his pallid brow, and felt the gentle moisture which already began to ooze from the sleeper’s skin ; for our readers, doubtless, have already suspected that the draught which the leech had administered to Robert of Artois in the presence of the prior was nothing morre than a powerful soporific, the wound he had received being anything but likely to cause his death, although from neglect and loss of blood it had occasioned considerable exhaustion.

“We must be brief,” said Ezra, disturbing the old man’s reverie of vengeance ; “day soon will dawn ; and it is not good men’s eyes

should gaze upon us bearing the body to the house—shall I raise him ?”

Abram made a sign of assent, and his companion soon removed the sleeper from his recumbent position ; and, with the assistance of the old man, was proceeding to envelop him in a cloak brought with them for the purpose, when a deep voice startled them. The curate had recollected that the body had been interred with several articles of value, which the prior, in the agitation of the moment, had either forgotten or not thought it worth while to remove ; amongst them a chain of gold and precious signet ring had attracted his avarice, and he was returning to the vault to secure them, when he was startled by the sight of the two Jews, whom he doubted not were there with the same intention. So servile was the respect and deference which all of their race paid to the humblest member of his sacred profession, so accustomed was he, in trampling upon them, to find an unresisting neck, that the idea of any possible danger to himself never once crossed his imagination.

“Dogs !” he exclaimed ; “is it thus ye abuse the mercy of our holy Church, which suffers ye to draw your polluted breath in Christian lands in peace ? Violate the dead ! break open the sepulchre of a noble knight for the sake of the treasure he can no longer defend ! Alas ! alas ! what will not the thirst of gold lead men to ?”

“Especially priests,” interrupted Ezra, in a cold, sneering tone ; “the reverend father measures the strength of others’ conscience by the weakness of his own. It were a curious speculation to decide what brought him here.”

The curate coloured with mingled shame and anger at the implied accusation, which a secret monitor whispered him was just ; still, as no proof existed of his intentions, he answered boldly, with the assumed confidence of insulted innocence :

“My motives are known to Heaven ; I parley not with unbelievers of the duties of mine office, which alone have brought me here. You will answer to the Church for this outrage on its laws—this robbery of the dead. Infidels, I arrest ye both.”

A low laugh, like the hiss of a serpent, rang through the vault as Ezra sprang upon the speaker, caught him in his giant arms, and forced him upon his knees beside the empty coffin ; then twining his long bony fingers in the hair of the priest, he kept him like an infant immovable in the position he had placed him in. For the first time the intruder’s heart beat wildly, and he lost his haughty tone.

“What would you, masters ?” he cried, his cheek becoming paler as he spoke. “The crime may be atoned without the price of blood. Holy Church is not relentless, and a slight fine, perchance—”

"Ha, ha, ha! a fine!" exclaimed his captor. "The Christian dog prates as if he were in the presbytery, and we captives and bound before him. A fine! how holy Church loves gold!—ha, ha! a fine!—how much, how much?"

"Mercy!" exclaimed the curate, now seriously alarmed for his life, which, after such an outrage upon his person, he could no longer deem secure. "I'll be silent!—bind me by what oath you will—upon the Evangile, nay, on the consecrated Host itself; only spare my life!—I'll show you," he added, "where the sacred vessels of the church are all concealed; they are of gold—pure gold. Dogs! you will not dare to shed a Christian's blood?"

"Is it redder than a Jew's?" demanded Ezra, still keeping him, despite his frantic struggles, on his knees. "Father," he added, addressing his companion in a tone of deep respect, "decide; day will soon break. What shall be his fate?"

"Death!" said Abram, who had listened to the curate's offers of betraying the vessels of the church with contempt. "In the oath of a false priest there is no reliance; in the heart of a coward mercy hath no dwelling. Once free he would break his vow of secrecy, and laugh at the credulous Jews as he consigned them to the flames."

"As thou art a man—as thou art human," shrieked the priest, "have pity!"

"Am I a man?" replied the Hebrew, in a low, stern voice. "Why am I hunted, then, like a vile beast of prey, by those who call themselves my fellow men? E'en from his mother's womb, the Jew is made the scoff of a superstitious rabble, less brutal than their teachers; his blood is thirsted for, e'en as the traveller lost in the desert thirsteth for the well. Ye have made earth no more a heritage for its once chosen people. Ye reckon us like herds, yet hold us in far less estimation; ye rend the flesh from off our aching bones, doom, despoil us, beat us, rob us of our children and our wealth. In your Christian pride, ye trample us like potsherds 'neath your feet, yet, in the hour of vengeance, prate to us of humanity and mercy."

"Pity!" murmured the fainting man, already half-dead with terror.

"Pity!" iterated the Israelite, in a tone of scorn; "were we in open day, and I grovelling like a worm beneath thy feet, what pity wouldst thou render me? What would be thy answer to my prayers and tears? Scoffs and bitter mockeries. And why?—because chance made thee a Christian and me a Jew. Still it shall not be said that Abram, without necessity, was cruel. As gently as the shadow of the destroying angel's wing fell on the sleeping heathen's host, so death shall fall on thee. I sacrifice thy life not to my vengeance, but to my safety, priest."

The speaker drew from his vest the envenomed instrument with

which, on a previous occasion, he had menaced the esquire of Robert of Artois, and with a firm hand inflicted a slight puncture upon the neck of the kneeling man, immediately below the left ear ; so small was the orifice that but a single drop of blood trickled from the wound, although the effect was mortal. The head of the priest fell gently upon his breast, as the hand of Ezra was withdrawn ; and, with a gentle sigh, the spirit fled from its earthly tabernacle for ever.

"How shall we dispose of the Nazarene's body ?" demanded the dwarf.

"I have bethought me," said his master. "Clothe him in the garments of the sleeper, and place him in the empty sepulchre. Should suspicion lead men to search the tomb, they will find, at least, a mouldering corpse, and the ring and chain of Robert Artois—his gown and cowl we must reduce to ashes."

"Tis well," exclaimed Ezra ; "but if the seekers come soon they will never take the features of the fat priest for the stately face of the Norman knight, although the colour of their hair and beards are not unlike. How the craven proffered oaths and gold to save his life ! I question if he would have hesitated to have thrown his soul into the bargain."

"Silence !" said Abram, in a tone of calm authority. "Sport not with the dead ; we are no more its judges. As for the discovery thou pratest of, let but twelve hours elapse, and the eye even of the mother who bore him would fail to recognise the inmate of yon coffin. To thy work, Ezra, and perform it diligently," he added ; "for it is a task in which I cannot aid thee ; the corpse of an unbeliever would pollute the hand of a sacred Levite."

The bodies of the living and the dead were quickly stripped by the dwarf, and arrayed each in the other's clothes. The latter was then lifted into the coffin from which the former had been so recently removed. Although so lately deceased, traces of decomposition already began to be visible upon the features of the priest ; and it was with a feeling of perfect security that Ezra closed the ponderous lid.

"Now raise the knight upon thy shoulders, and follow me," exclaimed the elder Israelite. "Once in the church, I will extinguish the torch ; darkness will best protect us."

Daylight had already begun to dawn when the two Hebrews, unseen by mortal eyes, left the profaned sanctuary of St. Julian, and regained the secure shelter of their lonely habitation.

* * * * *

Three days after the marriage of Ulrick and Mirvan, the two bridegrooms were summoned, together with most of the Norman and Saxon nobles, to attend a council to be held by Herbert de Lozenga, at the episcopal palace, where matters of grave import

were to be discussed, affecting nothing less than the succession to the Crown. By some means, the share which William of Normandy had taken in the abduction of the two brides had got whispered about—probably from some of the garrison of Filby; and men's minds were violently disposed against him. As soon as the principal personages who had been summoned were assembled, the prelate who presided exposed to them the villainy of the prince; his father's well-known disposition in his favour, contrary to the rights of his elder brother Robert; and concluded by demanding if they were willing to assist in placing a tyrant on the throne who had proved so reckless of their rights and honours, whose deceit and cruelty were known to all, and whose reign could hardly fail of proving destructive alike to Norman as to Saxon independence.

"Never, by Heaven!" exclaimed Ulrick; "let others bow a vassal knee to this unknighly robber; mine ne'er shall bend before him. If England must own a foreign king, let him at least be one whom primogeniture hath pointed out the Conqueror's natural successor. The isle," he added, "is not a petty fief, to be transferred at his caprice or pleasure. Robert of Normandy shall be my sovereign, let who will else acknowledge William's title to the crown. Nobles, it is for you to say if I have spoken well."

"You have," answered Mirvan and Odo of Caen, with one voice, both equally excited as himself by the unmanly outrage which had been offered to Matilda and Isabel. "Long live our valiant brother in arms, and future king, Prince Robert of Normandy!"

Edda and the rest of the nobles, entranced—the former by his love for his grandson, and the latter by the example of two such powerful leaders as Mirvan and Odo—joined in the shout; and all but Eborard, the wily prior of the Dominicans, added their voices to the cry, which was enthusiastically repeated amid the clash of swords, which the assembly waved above their heads in token of adherence and fidelity to the cause of their future sovereign.

Robert, who was present, gracefully bowed his thanks. He could, despite the natural familiarity of his manners, assume, when occasion required it, both the language and the bearing of a prince. His words were brief, but to the purpose. He pledged himself—should he by their aid defeat the unnatural disposition of his father in his brother's favour—to govern justly, confirm the existing rights of the nobility, and look upon his Norman and Saxon subjects but as children of the same great family. When he had finished speaking, the shout again echoed through the hall—"Long live Robert of Normandy!"

"Words," said Herbert de Lozenga, rising as soon as the tumult had subsided, "are but air, and leave no impress of their purport. Let all here prove that they are men who dare maintain by acts the resolution they have spoken. Here is a deed," he added, throwing at the same time a parchment which he drew from his breast upon

the table, "by which we bind ourselves to venture our lives and fortunes, lands and honours, in the cause. I'll be the first to sign it; and may Heaven reward me for the act, as I believe it to be just and holy!"

No sooner had the prelate affixed his signature than the nobles crowded round the table, impatient which should be the first to follow his example; even the prior, who saw no hope of escape, and who began to look on William's cause as hopeless, did as the rest; George of Erpingham and Walter Tyrrel were the last to sign. As leaders of the forces of the bishop, they had both been summoned to the meeting. As soon as the ceremony was completed, Herbert de Lozenga folded the parchment and placed it in his bosom.

"Thanks, nobles, vavasours, and knights!" exclaimed Robert, his eyes flashing with the anticipation of a crown. "It is to you that I shall owe my throne; and, trust me, your future sovereign——"

"Our actual king!" interrupted the prelate, sinking on his knee and kissing the speaker's hand. "Your royal father sleeps his last sleep. William the Conqueror, of all his vast possessions, retains but six feet of earth; he expired ten days since at the monastery of St. Gervas. May God assoil his soul in peace."

So unexpected was the intelligence, that for a few moments those who heard it were mute with surprise. News did not then fly with the celerity of the present day; none but the speaker and Robert suspected even the monarch's illness. As soon as they recovered themselves, every knee was bent to the earth, and one simultaneous cry arose of "God save the king!"

"Sire," exclaimed Mirvan, "the present is the time for action, not for words. Might I presume to counsel you, with the dawn, surrounded by your faithful nobles, you must commence your march towards London. Your brother has many friends, active as he is ambitious. A single day's delay might prejudice your cause; therefore, again I say, on to London."

A smile passed between Herbert de Lozenga and the prince; for no other, except his gaoler, was aware of the captivity of William, so faithfully had the secret of his arrest been kept by those who had undertaken its execution.

"Small danger from our brother," replied Robert, "since our good friend and faithful counsellor (bowing to the bishop) holds him in safe ward. We can arrange our differences without an appeal to arms. Where the lion's skin will not avail him," he added, "William can assume the fox's; doubt not but he will listen to such reasons as we offer."

"And may I ask your highness," demanded Odo of Caen—for the kings of England did not, till a much later date, assume the title of majesty—"what terms you intend proposing to the prince?"

"The plain fulfilment of our father's will," replied Robert, "simply substituting my name for his. England for the elder born, Normandy for the younger : they are not too hard, methinks, since both by right of primogeniture are mine."

"And what security will your highness exact," said Edda, "that he keep faith with you?"

"His knightly oath," said the prince, "and my own good sword will prove sufficient pledges for his faith."

There was a pause, for not one present but was struck with the worthlessness of the first, and the little reliance which was to be placed upon the second part of the security. Thoughts dangerous to the captive's safety were passing in the minds of many, yet no one was found hardy enough to give utterance to the suggestions of his mind. Odo of Caen was the first to break the silence which oppressed them, and make himself the interpreter of the thoughts of all.

"Prince," he began, "there are men to whom oaths are as water or the changing wind—men whom no ties, however sacred, can hold—men whom the slightest breath of passion can induce to break their deep-sworn faith. William is one of these. A nation's peace, the safety of your friends, and the stability of the throne, demand a surer pledge than these."

"I understand," replied Robert, his cheek blanching as he spoke ; "you mean the tomb. But no, rather would I forego the crown itself, wander a simple knight the wide world through, seek fortune in the desert, than stain my hand in my unnatural brother's blood. True he has wronged me ; but the same womb bore us. True he would rob me of my birthright ; yet I have never read that Esau slew his brother. My hand would lack the strength to grasp the sceptre were it stained in William's blood. Think not of it more."

"It needs not, prince," said Walter Tyrrel, who already looked upon his captive's fortunes as for ever set, and who was anxious to render himself acceptable to the new monarch. "William is under my guard ; leave it to me, and he shall never cross your path again."

"Boy !" exclaimed the prince, "greatness is ever cursed by ready tools like thee ! Thou dost belie thy blood by such degrading service ; we had thoughts to have held thee near our person, and fostered thy career. This proffered baseness changes our intent. Retire from the council, sir ; nor presume to approach our presence until summoned. Father," he added, in a whisper to the bishop, "there is a curse upon our race ; the tiger's whelp, reared in the peaceful fold, betrays its lineage by its instinctive thirst for blood. Can the wild legend of our land be true ? Are we indeed Robert the Devil's brood ?"

Bowing lowly to conceal the rage and mortification but too visible upon his features, Walter Tyrrel left the apartment. A quiet smile

of satisfaction played on the features of the prior of the Dominicans, as he did so, for he saw that the prince had made an implacable enemy, and that he himself had found a tool fitted for his purpose.

"Wisely hast thou spoken, prince," said Herbert de Lozenga; "for what blessing could attend a crown bought with a brother's blood? But there are other means than oaths to bind this man—a means to draw the venom from his fangs, yet leave him still with life. Let him, in an assembly of the nobles, from my hands accept the priestly vows. No bishop then could crown him, no sword be drawn for his pretended rights. Once devoted to the altar, the Church would know well how to guard her own."

"By Rollo, priest, but thou hast hit the mark," exclaimed Robert, whose heart began to beat freely for the first time since the disposal of his brother's person had been debated. "William will make a jovial monk, and many an abbey and fat benefice shall mark our loving favour."

A murmur of approbation arose amidst the nobles, who saw in the proposal of the prelate a bloodless solution of their difficulty. It was finally resolved that on the following day the prisoner should be brought before them, and compelled to conform himself to their decision, which the bishop undertook previously to make him acquainted with; and with this understanding the council separated.

As Eborard crossed the cloisters on his way to his litter, he encountered Walter Tyrrel, who, still smarting under the reproof he had received, paced their deep shades, meditating schemes of vengeance. The wily churchman read his purpose in his knit brow and quick impatient step, and foresaw that his advances would be gladly met.

"Methinks, sir knight," he whispered, "devotion like thine demands at least some courtesy; even in its refusal, William had received its proffer better. Our new-made monarch must feel the crown securely on his brow ere he ventured to spurn the hand that might have rent it from him."

"That might have rent it from him!" iterated the excited man; "that will! Father, I know thou lovest not this same Robert; I marked thy hesitation when the bishop proposed the signing of the traitorous act. Set but thy foot to mine, and the withered leaf the wind makes sport of shall not prove more worthless."

"What meanst thou, son?" demanded the prior, with an air of well-affected simplicity.

"Thou lovest not this would-be king—this Robert of Normandy?"

"Certes, he hath proved himself scant friend to me or to my order," replied the priest, with a shrug.

"That is as plain as words can say," resumed Tyrrel, "thou hatest him—so I do; the lightning is not less dangerous because it slumbers in the thunder-cloud, nor thy hatred less to be feared

because veiled in outward calm and priestly unction. Wilt thou join hands with me in this ?”

“I will,” replied Eborard, in a voice so low that the impetuous questioner caught the sense of his reply more from the look which accompanied it than the sound of the words. “Tell me,” he added, “how can I aid thee in the enterprise ? Speak in all confidence ; let there be faith, my son, between us.”

“I am William’s gaoler,” answered the traitor, in the same subdued tone. “Hast thou two fleet steeds within thy stables ?”

“I have,” said the priest, with a smile of intelligence, for he began clearly to see Tyrrel’s purpose ; “and they are both at thy disposal ; better ne’er bore a knight unto the field ; kings might mount them to do battle for their crowns.”

“’Tis well, father ! ’tis well ! Let them be waiting saddled at the city gates. I will find horsemen for them both.”

“When ?” demanded the churchman.

“At midnight ; we have scant time to lose.”

The prior bowed his head in token of acquiescence, and requested to know if the fugitives would require gold for their journey, which he offered to supply them with, so anxious was he to secure the success of a project on which his future fortunes hung. His contentment increased when Tyrrel informed him that he had coin enough.

“But, how—how,” he demanded, “will you provide for his escape ? All else seems easy after that.”

“Leave it to me,” replied the knight ; “long ere the dawn the prince shall be upon the road to London. Lanfranc, the primate, is his friend. The citizens will eagerly receive him. Once securely king, doubt not but William’s gratitude will find within the Church a position more suited to thy services and zeal.”

“Heaven knows best, my son,” said his hearer, trying hard to look humble and indifferent ; “we court not worldly honours, but are content to be a humble watch-dog in the fold. Let us not waste the time in vain discourse,” he added, casting at the same time a hasty glance to see if their conversation was observed, “lest evil eyes behold us. Keep but thy purpose, and the horses shall not fail thee. Farewell ! our Lady prosper thy intent !”

With these words the two conspirators separated—the prior to find his litter, and Walter Tyrrel to the tower where William of Normandy, like a caged lion, fretted away the hours of his captivity.

He had not long regained his post, when Herbert de Lozenga arrived to communicate to his prisoner the decision of his brother and the nobles. His faithful marshal, George of Erpingham, attended him.

“’Tis well, sir knight,” said the bishop, as Tyrrel rose and saluted him ; “you keep good ward. Continue thy services, and the present

cloud upon thy fortunes will pass away. How fares our prisoner ? Impatient, doubtless, of his durance ? ”

“As a wolf caught in a springe, my lord ; but I exchange few words with him. Curses and threats are sweetest words with him. My own temper is none of the most patient, and I avoid him, lest I should forget the respect due to his birth, as well as to his defenceless state ; an he escape, let our new monarch look to it.”

“Small fear of that,” replied the prelate ; “our towers are high, and you keep faithful guard. After to-morrow’s evening, come to me in my oratory ; I have much to speak with you upon, as well as reconcile you to your offended prince, in whose good favour, after all, you have a pleader whom you wot not of.”

The knight merely bowed his acquiescence, and the speaker, with his companion, entered the prison.

“Tis the last time,” murmured Tyrrel to himself, “I shall be forced to wear the mask before him. When next we meet, my deeds shall make me known ; but till that hour arrives, patience—patience.” And once more he resumed his watch before the tower.

William was pacing his chamber with impatient strides when the churchman and his attendant entered : it was the first time of their meeting since the moment of his arrest. To one of his restless character, captivity was galling enough, but uncertainty was even worse than actual restraint. In the hours of his solitude he had pondered on its probable result, and formed a thousand schemes of vengeance on the man whose energy had baffled him ; he longed for : yet feared the encounter, experience had taught him he had to deal with one with whom to resolve was to execute. He felt that he was too dangerous a captive to be lightly loosed. The prelate felt on his part that he had a difficult mission to fulfil : to bend an ambitious, proud, and stubborn mind to the resignation of its long-cherished hopes of rule and ambition. For a moment, therefore, they regarded each other in silence, measuring, like skilful wrestlers, each the other’s strength. The passionate prisoner was the first to speak.

“So, my lord, you are come at last. I trust it is to implore our pardon for this strange outrage on your monarch’s son. You have taken a strange way, methinks, to repay our royal father’s favour, by holding his son a captive. Tremble at his wrath when he shall hear of it ; his indignant hand will rend the mitre from thy brow, e’en though the Pontiff’s self had placed it there.”

“The vilest slave, the poorest serf,” replied Herbert de Lozenga, unmoved by the prince’s threats, “will never more start at the Conqueror’s wrath or fear his frown ; thy father sleeps his last sleep ; the archangel’s trump alone can awaken him.”

“Dead ! ” exclaimed William, to whom the intelligence, in his present position, brought tenfold danger. “Dead ! Where is thy

knee, sir priest? Forgettest thou that thou speakest to England's king, or do I see a traitor?"

"Traitor I am none. My knee hath already offered earthly homage to its lawful sovereign, thy elder brother Robert. The assembled nobles," added the churchman, "have confirmed my voice; in two days he marches on to London."

"To be crowned!" shrieked William. "Priest of Belial! 'tis thou hast plotted this—my witless brother hath not brains to springe a woodcock with. Tell me," he added fiercely, "what is the bribe for which he bought thy soul? Try if I cannot outbid him. Was't gold—was't power? for priests I know, love both. Tell me thy price!—my ransacked kingdom shall be ground to pay it; thy voice in England shall be but second to mine own."

"Prince," interrupted his visitor, "it is already greater far than thine, since by my mouth the king thy brother speaks."

"I say the traitor Robert Duke of Normandy!" exclaimed the prisoner, foaming with impotent passion, and striking his clenched fist upon the table till the blood trickled from his knuckles; then, controlling himself with a violent effort, he added, "and what would our loving brother with the fool his knavish tool hath snared? But I guess!—imprisoned monarchs seldom have long to live."

"Unhappy man! thy words are but the echoes of thine own evil heart. Robert's voice was the first to spare thy life; he would not wear a crown bought with thy blood. Learn," he added, presenting him with a paper, "upon what terms thou still mayst live, if not a monarch, at least in honourable state."

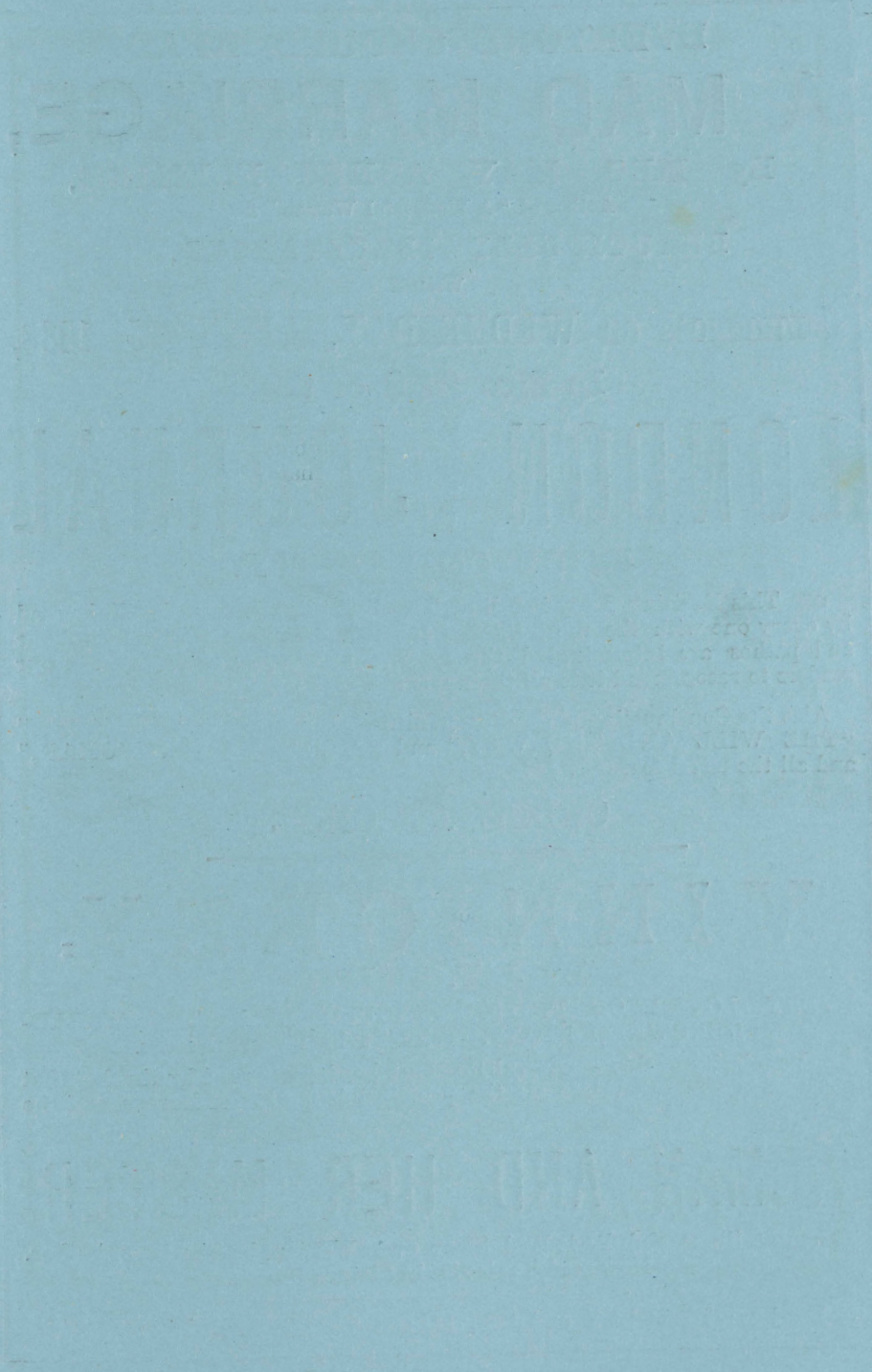
William eagerly perused the paper, and his cheek became alternately red and pale, as rage or fear predominated, while he did so. As he concluded, his passion broke all bounds; he tore the document into a thousand pieces, exclaiming as he did so:

"Accursed priest! this is thy work. In every line I read thy subtle malice. But thou shalt tear the quivering flesh from off these bones with pincers—pour molten lead into my throbbing veins—rend out my heart, ere I consent to pronounce the damning vow. A priest! Moloch shall be my god, and blood my consecration; thy life shall be the first I offer at his shrine."

The infuriated man sprang upon the prelate, and, unarmed as he was, would have strangled him or dashed his brains out against his prison walls, had not George of Erpingham interposed his giant strength between them. With his mailed hand he thrust him back, and William, exhausted by his passions, sank upon a seat—his hair erect, his eyes glaring upon the churchman like a foiled tiger disappointed in its spring.

Herbert de Lozenga gazed on him with a mingled sentiment of pity and contempt.

"Prince," he said, in a tone unmoved by anger, "thou hast heard



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
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